



**CITIZENSHIP AND RECOVERY OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUBURBAN SPACE**  
Erasmus+ project n. 2021-1- IT03-KA220-YOU-000028963

# Re-Think by Networks Guidelines

A working proposal to promote active citizenship  
of young people through urban regeneration



CROSS- Citizenship and Recovery of Opportunities for Suburban Space  
Erasmus+ KA220 Cooperation Partnerships in Youth  
Project n. 2021-1- IT03-KA220-YOU-000028963

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Why Guidelines?

The purpose of this publication is to provide those working in the field of youth work and community empowerment with indications and reflections for the development of urban regeneration interventions, based on the CROSS project experience. The project, funded by the Erasmus programme in the youth field and implemented in the years 2022-2024 proposed a methodology for the social activation of communities through the regeneration of spaces, by analysing and comparing the strategies implemented by several European realities actively involved in youth and youth policies.

In the course of the project, through participation in meetings, group work, training activities and the integration of different competences, some themes emerged as particularly relevant in different contexts and countries so that we decided to include in this publication a reflection on them as shared as possible.

The idea of compiling the experience in a publication and outlining guidelines for possible action arose from the desire to disseminate the project's reflections so that they could be further discussed, contributing to the public debate. Furthermore, the publication is designed to provide operational indications on a possible strategy for working with young people through urban regeneration interventions. These indications can provide reflections and working tools to youth organisations, youth centres, youth workers, social workers, public institutions and policy makers.

The document consists of three sections: a first introductory section presents the key issues addressed by the project, the situation of partner countries and some general considerations; the second section is devoted to the project methodology, providing indications on activities, tools, approaches and lessons learnt; the third section summarises some guidelines extrapolated from the project experience.

## 1.2 Project partnership



ARCI Livorno is part of the national association Arci, a popular organisation with more than five thousand community centres, and almost one million members throughout Italy. Arci promotes culture, equal rights, social justice, anti-racism and peace among peoples, and is committed to building an active and aware citizenship. The territorial committee is the subject appointed by the statute to represent the association in the territory, to provide assistance to the network of circles and to oversee compliance with the statute and the association's values, and for this reason the committee also has a guiding and monitoring function. The Livorno Territorial Committee currently has more than thirty circles.

LINC is a non-profit social cooperative that operates in the community sector. LINC supports organisations, institutions and associations in designing interventions related to community development and empowerment.



The aim is to enhance the resources of individuals and communities through capacity building to foster inclusive communities. Over the years, the cooperative has built many interventions aimed at promoting youth participation and strengthening active citizenship skills through educational services and projects.



AIFED is a non-governmental organization working at regional, national and European level in the field of education, culture, inclusion and employment. Based in Granada, Spain, the NGO was created in 2008. The organization was created at the initiative of experienced educators and teachers with the aim of creating a non-profit association with a humanistic character that offers opportunities for entrepreneurship training, community development and promotes equal opportunities for all members of society. The NGO works in the management and innovation of training and employment programmes for different sectors of activity and various target groups.

Form2you is a non-profit NGO that aims to improve organizations' social and human capital as a strategy for increasing their capacity to respond to external problems and opportunities. To realise its goals, Form2you creates, organizes, and maintains several consultancy and training programs in areas such as mentoring, coaching, fundraising, total quality management, social support, volunteering, design, and social innovation processes. Form2you has assisted organizations and social enterprises in: Excluded and disadvantaged families, adults, and children; Active Aging and Elder Care, and Social Economy Organizations, among others. All the activities are idealized to provide fun and a relaxed atmosphere, where participants can increase their self-esteem and self-confidence.



CitizensLab is a living lab and a community of practice, where diverse actors of societal transformation processes, systems leaders, activists, facilitators, provocateurs and community organisers join our experiential learning formats, workshops, and gatherings. CitizensLab brings a regenerative approach into the field of citizen engagement, integrating the cognitive, the emotional and the physical body as we seek to rewrite current narratives of democracy.

EUROPANET Association was established as an Educational and training association in 2010 and developed European projects in Youth, Grundtvig, LLP, ERASMUS + programme over the years. "European Mobility", "inter-generationality" and



and "trans-nationality" are concepts that stand up to the base of all their projects, whether they speak about "Social art", "Social Entrepreneurship", "Leadership", "Management" or "Working Together". EUROPANET Association is working at local, national and international level with schools, NGO-s, Businesses or Public Administration bodies. EUROPANET Association has a board of members, a managerial department with experience in implementing of European projects, has 84 volunteers (young, adults and seniors) and collaborates with more than 30 experts from different domains: education, social art, entrepreneurship.

### 1.3 Community, youth participation and urban regeneration

The CROSS project held together three key concepts: youth participation - urban regeneration - community empowerment. In fact, the project started from the assumption that only by promoting youth protagonism and offering young people the opportunity to feel active, it is possible to produce significant results in terms of participation and active citizenship in the development of local communities. The ambitions, creativity and values of young people must be harnessed and find spaces for expression and listening in order to produce real change that will enable them to create the future they want and shape the contexts in which they live.

The choice was therefore to involve young people in the construction of a real intervention on the ground in the community where they live, providing them with opportunities to actively exercise a decision-making process to achieve concrete objectives. The main emphasis was placed on the construction process of the urban regeneration intervention, rather than on the intervention project itself, because it was precisely through a step-by-step process that it was possible to involve the local communities with the idea of supporting them in the identification of their needs and resources, an essential step to promote their empowerment. Empowerment is a "process-outcome" word in that it names both the process for achieving a certain outcome and the outcome itself, characterizing the subject's empowered state. Empowerment refers to both (I) subjective experience and objective reality; and it is, at the same time, (II) a process and a goal (Swift & Levine, 1987). Empowering means activating resources and skills already existing, increasing in individual and collective subjects the ability to use their positive qualities and what the context offers on a material and symbolic level to act on situations and to change them.

The need to promote youth participation and empowerment processes is all the stronger in contexts of high social marginality and poverty (cultural and economic) that drive young people to leave or live with frustration at the condition of their communities, struggling to see opportunities for change. These are the conditions that often characterise the suburbs or rural areas of cities, contributing to a reading of the contemporary city that pits centre and periphery against each other. In fact, the former is presented as the vital part of the city, home to commercial activities and services, a place of culture, an expression of historical values and community identity, while the term periphery has taken on a negative meaning, indicating

weak areas of the city, with economic, social and urban structure problems. The latter indicates both the arrangement of buildings in the urban space and their functions and was the key element of interest in the project, starting from the consideration that the location, structural conditions, uses, accessibility of spaces and buildings have important repercussions on the way the local community lives and feels its neighbourhood. In fact, suburban neighbourhoods often present themselves as concentrations of residential buildings (especially social housing) where there is no place for social and cultural spaces, welcoming and beautiful collective spaces. The emphasis was therefore on reconnecting communities through the regeneration of physical spaces, making young citizens the initiators of this process.

Urban regeneration in fact means the process of reusing and reorganising the spaces of existing cities. This process takes into account not only the physical dimension of spaces but also social, environmental and economic factors. For this reason, urban regeneration projects are complex interventions that aim to make cities and neighbourhoods more sustainable and people-friendly, promoting the wellbeing of local communities. According to the World Urbanization Prospect 2023 today 57% of the global population lives in the cities and this will rise to 60% in 2030 (and could reach 82% in 20250). It is therefore clear that one of the priorities today is to limit the construction of new buildings, counteracting the frenetic and indiscriminate use of building land. This means encouraging the reuse of urban land, starting by rethinking what already exists. Local communities play a key role in this process: not only public authorities and professionals (architects, planners, builders) but also citizens who experience urban spaces on a daily basis.

In this perspective, the project wanted to contribute to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027 encouraging "young people to become active citizens, agents of solidarity and positive change for communities across Europe, inspired by EU values and a European identity" and helping to "prevent youth social exclusion" as highlighted in the European Commission's communication COM(2018) 269 final ("Communication from the commission to the european parliament, the european council, the council, the european economic and social committee and the committee of the regions. Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy).

## 1.4 The state of the art

In order to gain a better understanding of the contexts in which the project was implemented and to construct forms of intervention capable of holding together the local needs of the communities involved, research was initially carried out. The research was conducted in the neighbourhoods involved in the project: the Shangai neighbourhood in Livorno (Italy), Neukölln in Berlin (Germany), Lourel in Sintra (Portugal), Lancha del Genil in Granada (Spain) and the peripheral and rural neighbourhoods of the city of Iasi (Romania). Despite their different positions in relation to the city space and the anagraphic composition of the communities, citizens in these neighbourhoods experience common problems of forms of marginalisation and exclusion, low incomes and widespread poverty, and poor care of housing.

In terms of youth policy, the difference to be noted is that in Romania and Portugal, youth laws are only regulated at the national level whereas in Italy, Germany and Portugal, they are regulated at three levels. In Italy and Spain, the local and regional level is more relevant, whereas in Germany all three levels are equally important. This means that the state, regions and cities/municipalities actively support youth policies. On the local level, moreover, all cities involved have forms of youth representation (such as youth councils, youth centres).

Regarding the need for urban regeneration interventions in each neighbourhood, projects and programmes for the regeneration of spaces have been planned and implemented over time by both institutions (such as local authorities) and organisations operating in these neighbourhoods.

Concerning the perception of the citizens living in these communities, the results are provided to us by the interviews conducted in the areas. Concerning the presence of public spaces for community use, most of the interviewees believe that they are present in their neighbourhoods, mainly for the use of families and children (with the exception of the Neukölln neighbourhood in Berlin, where the main users are young people under 30). In terms of the condition of these spaces, however, there is a big difference: while the communities of the neighbourhoods involved in Spain, Romania and Portugal tend to consider the conditions of these spaces very good or good, in Italy and Germany they are considered very bad. On the other hand, in terms of citizens' involvement in the decisions affecting the neighbourhood, the level appears low in almost all the communities involved (with the exception of the Spanish case) and even where there are associations and organisations that take care of the neighbourhood, the impact of their action does not seem particularly relevant.

Despite the differences, the research found that in the territories surveyed most citizens said they were happy to live in that neighbourhood/area (with the exception of Spain) and in addition to the presence of green spaces (in Germany and Romania) the local community was most appreciated (Italy, Portugal). It is no coincidence that in all areas the majority of citizens interviewed responded positively to the question "Do you feel there is a strong sense of community in your neighbourhood?" (except in Romania).

Great differences were instead recorded in terms of the perceived impact of any urban regeneration interventions promoted over the years in the territories. The interesting fact to note on this issue is that in the territories in which citizens confirmed a greater presence of regeneration interventions carried out over the years, there is also a greater perception of the presence and impact of the role of local institutions: this is the case in Spain (where the objects of intervention were mainly parks and public gardens) and Portugal (where interventions on historic buildings or degraded buildings and parks were recorded), while conversely there is a greater sense of neglect in the absence of interventions for the care and regeneration of spaces.

Finally, also with regard to the level of youth participation the territories surveyed differ greatly from one another: a clear no was recorded in Italy and Germany to the question of whether young people are active in the social life of the neighbourhood while more positive answers were recorded in Romania, Portugal and Spain. However, in all the neighbourhoods surveyed, the activities in which the presence of young people is found most are voluntary, artistic and recreational, and politically engaged activities, albeit with different levels in each case.

## 1.5 Civic participation and volunteering

Compared to the data that emerged from the analysis promoted within the CROSS project, a theme on which the partner organizations questioned was that of young people's civic activism through volunteering. Organised volunteering is a dynamic social phenomena, subject of interest and analysis at national and international level<sup>1</sup>. Volunteering is a sociologically complex phenomenon since it is an individual (micro) but socially shared (meso) experience with other volunteers and the beneficiaries of voluntary action, which also takes on a public (macro) dimension. In recent years, various international institutions and governments have recognised the role of volunteering in consolidating the values of active citizenship, democracy, solidarity and social cohesion, greatly expanding its traditional welfare and mutual aid functions. One of the challenges facing voluntary organisations is reconciling the provision of services to people and communities with the promotion of volunteer participation, maintaining a balance between the participatory and managerial dimensions, between the social and the economic. This complex relationship has led to tensions, misunderstandings and instrumentalization. In fact, the reservations and criticisms of the economic value of volunteering - strongly recommended by international agencies - are fuelled by the concern, already expressed in several EU countries, that volunteering could occupy and replace paid work, especially in this period of acute economic and financial crisis.

In Portugal, in 2018, the percentage of the resident population aged 15 or over who took part in at least one formal and/or informal voluntary work activity, was 7.8%, equivalent to around 695,000 volunteers. The formal volunteering rate was 6.4%, while the informal volunteering rate was 1.5%. The female volunteering rate was higher than the male rate (8.1% vs. 7.6%). The age group with the highest volunteering rate was 15-24 year olds (11.3%) and the participation in voluntary work increases progressively with the level of education. Drawing up a summary socio demographic profile of volunteers, it can be said that in formal voluntary work activities, younger, unemployed, more educated, female and single individuals stood out. In informal voluntary work, individuals in higher age groups, with high levels of education, unemployed, female and divorced/separated prevailed. Formal volunteering was mainly directed towards social services (36.2%), culture, communication and recreation organisations (15.7%) and religion (15.7%).

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<sup>1</sup> Mauro Serapioni, Observatório sobre Crises e Alternativas - Centro de Estudos Sociais da Universidade de Coimbra, [https://www.ces.uc.pt/observatorios/crisalt/index.php?id=6522&pag=7866&id\\_lingua=2](https://www.ces.uc.pt/observatorios/crisalt/index.php?id=6522&pag=7866&id_lingua=2)

In Italy, according to data processed by Openpolis<sup>2</sup> - Con i Bambini Foundation, based on data collected by Istat, young people under 25 are the age group most involved in associations when it comes to certain sectors such as the environment and peace. In 2022, the percentage of young people between 18-19 years old and 20-24 years olds who had carried out voluntary activities within an association in the last 12 months was 9.4% and 9.2%, compared to a national population average of 8.3%. If analyzed from a historical perspective, however, the percentages are much lower than those prior to the covid 19 pandemic: in 2019, in fact, 13.3% of young people aged between 18-19 and 12% of 20-24 year olds took part in activities of volunteering<sup>3</sup>. This decline in the data shows the impact of the consequences of the pandemic and containment measures. The data processed by Cevot<sup>4</sup> Sociometric research also gives us an important image of the perceptions and intentions of young citizens in the Tuscany Region, where the CROSS project was implemented. The most interesting data is the decline in the level of intention of young people aged between 18 and 29 to "definitely" volunteer: in 2022 the percentage was 20.3%, while in 2023 it stood at 12%. However, the percentage grew significantly compared to young people available to volunteer "occasionally" (62%) and "in case of exceptional events" (20.8%). In Italy, the tendency of young people to occasionally become involved in voluntary activities seems to be proven by what happens during major social and environmental emergencies during which many young people show unparalleled solidarity. However, this form of activation does not translate into a structured and continuous commitment to organized volunteering<sup>5</sup>.

The most recent data on volunteering in Germany is derived from the German Survey on Volunteering<sup>6</sup> (Deutscher Freiwilligensurvey, FWS) conducted in 2019, focusing on individuals aged 14 and above. This survey occurs every five years. In 2019, 28.8 million people, constituting 39.7% of Germany's population aged 14 and above, participated in voluntary work. Volunteering rates have increased across all age groups since 1999, with the most substantial growth observed among those aged 65 and above, reaching 31.2% in 2019 from 18.0% in 1999. The highest rate for 2019 is in the age group of 30 to 49 years (44.7%).

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<sup>2</sup> Openpolis-Con i Bambini, "La partecipazione dei giovani nelle organizzazioni sociali e nel volontariato" <https://www.openpolis.it/la-partecipazione-dei-giovani-nelle-organizzazioni-sociali-e-nel-volontariato/>

<sup>3</sup> ISTAT, "Censimento permanente delle istituzioni non profit. I primi risultati" (2021) <https://www.istat.it/it/files//2023/05/Censimento-non-profit-primi-risultati.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Preiti, Sociometrica, "4° Rapporto Opinione pubblica e altruismo in Toscana - Indagine demoscopica 2023" [https://www.cesvot.it/sites/default/files/type\\_documento/documentazione/allegati/4\\_rapporto\\_opinione\\_pubblica\\_e\\_altruismo\\_in\\_toscana\\_anno\\_2023.pdf](https://www.cesvot.it/sites/default/files/type_documento/documentazione/allegati/4_rapporto_opinione_pubblica_e_altruismo_in_toscana_anno_2023.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Vanessa Pallucchi, "Terzo settore. Meno giovani fanno volontariato. Ecco quali risposte si possono dare" <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/le-realta-del-terzo-settore-di-fronte-al-calo>

<sup>6</sup> Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, "Volunteering in Germany. Key Findings of the Fifth German Survey on Volunteering (FWS 2019)" <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/184604/a7cd006da6aed57d6d0dfab4a38e4212/5-freiwilligensurvey-englisch-data.pdf>

Differences in volunteering rates among educational groups have expanded. Individuals with higher-level school education (51.1%) exhibit higher engagement compared to those with medium-level (37.4%) and lower-level (26.3%) school education. Volunteering rates among those with a migrant background (27.0%) are lower than those without (44.4%), with variations among subgroups. For instance, those born in Germany with German citizenship have a rate of 38.7%. It's important to note that this survey doesn't account for the Covid-19 pandemic period, during which most activities were canceled due to lockdown restrictions. Although some activities shifted online, a decrease in volunteering among young people has been documented<sup>7</sup>.

Also in Spain volunteerism encountered challenges influenced by economic strain, high unemployment impacting commitment, and the pandemic's disruptive effect, causing a decline in opportunities but sparking focused efforts, notably in healthcare support. Demographic shifts towards an aging population impacted volunteer availability, especially for longer-term commitments due to potential health limitations. Volunteer organizations faced hurdles in recruitment and retention due to evolving attitudes and technological adaptation issues. Addressing these challenges required promoting the value of volunteering, creating flexible opportunities, leveraging technology for volunteer engagement and providing incentives for contributions.

In Romania the situation appears different from what was observed by the rest of the partnership. Young people in Romania appear very active in associational organizations, especially in youth associations that propose activities that develop them personally and professionally. The main problem is at the level of public policies, because young people do not feel valued, they are not involved in any way in the establishment of urban future plans (and not only that). There are communities in Romania where there are informal local action groups dedicated to young people within the Local Councils or within the town halls (so in public



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<sup>7</sup> Florence Jenkins, Lockdown consequences for volunteering in Berlin  
<https://thegermanyeye.com/lockdown-consequences-for-volunteering-in-berlin-3968>

institutions). But these examples are very few and young people are actually used for actions of political parties and less for civic activities.

In general, the causes that prevent volunteering are diversified and depend on personal and collective factors. The challenges imposed by the covid 19 pandemic and the economic crisis have contributed negatively to the phenomenon, especially affecting the most fragile sections of the population, including the youth. These same economical and cultural challenges are also affecting organizations and associations, which find themselves facing increasingly complex social phenomena with fewer resources at their disposal. A new intergenerational alliance seems to be necessary to re-activate youth resources within the community. At the same time, the importance of digital innovation and cultural changes require organizations to identify and build new tools and new languages for dialogue with new generations.

## Chapter 2. Young community activators: the project experience

### 2.1 Project overview

The CROSS project, funded by the Erasmus programme, was implemented between 2022 and 2024 in five different European countries: Italy (project leader), Spain, Portugal, Germany and Romania. The main objective of the project was to promote citizenship and active participation of young people, especially those from marginalized neighbourhoods, through the tools of urban regeneration. To do this, the project encouraged an approach based on action-research and community development to foster local knowledge, exchange good practices with European partners, support local networks (associations, committees, municipalities) to increase participation in neighbourhood decision-making processes and spread the culture of 'regeneration' of urban spaces.

The project involved three different actions, built according to a logic of temporal but also conceptual continuity, from the in-depth analysis of the contexts, to listening to the local communities, up to the planning, and where possible the implementation, of the regeneration interventions. Local teams of young people were involved in all the actions, supported by the project operators with the aim of encouraging the active citizenship of the young generations through direct experience.

In the project framework, the term "active citizenship" refers to the ability to recognize and understand individual and collective needs in light of which to be able to identify and mobilize resources (in terms of both materials and skills and knowledge how) to respond to them. In particular towards the protection of collective assets and spaces, imagining the transformations of physical spaces as the mirror of social transformations. In fact, in the logic of the project, young people were the primary recipients of the actions implemented but in turn became activators of the communities. This method of intervention was adopted precisely to try to promote a sense of protagonism and responsibility, translated into real action in the community by supporting young people as agents of change but also as actors capable of reading the context, detecting needs and in turn mobilizing the human, cultural and material resources of the community.

## 2.2 The project strategy

From a methodological point of view, the project took the “6 six steps model for community empowerment” as a reference. This model was proposed by Seunghyun Yoo, James Butler, Thistle I. Elias and Robert M. Goodman, researchers in the field of community psychology and health promotion. The 6-step model for community empowerment is based on the concept of community capacity and the social ecological theory. The model involves the following steps: 1) entering the community; 2) identifying issues of interest or concern to the community; 3) prioritizing the identified issues; 4) formulating a strategy to address a priority issue; 5) developing and implementing an action plan to address the priority issue; 6) moving on to a new issue and leadership. The model has been applied in different communities with diverse geographic, ethnic and ethnic backgrounds, showing positive results in terms of empowerment and health.

Clearly, in the framework of CROSS project this intervention model was not applied in a schematic way but influenced the path of work during the design and implementation phase. In this framework, the project involved the creation of youth teams who took part in every step of the activities at a local level, with the guidance and support of researchers from the partner organizations. The approach promoted sees the children not only as recipients but as co-builders of the paths, enhancing talents and creativity. The educational perspective was based on experiential learning through learning by doing, where the organisation's operators had the role of expert facilitators of the group. This section summarises the project actions with the relevant intervention methods and tools adopted, with the intention of making the experience replicable in other contexts.

### Phase 1. ReGeneration Research

In the first phase of the project, research was carried out with the aim of obtaining a snapshot of the starting situation in all partner countries. The research had two main focuses: the hubs and the urban regeneration phenomena promoted in the neighborhoods where the projects were carried out. The research was carried out in three moments:

1. Desk research. The organizations initially collected quantitative and qualitative data on local contexts.
2. Interviews. The partner organizations have developed a shared questionnaire model,
3. Focus group. During the focus groups carried out with groups of young people at a local

level in each partner country, the following themes were analysed: 1. Sense of community, 2. Active involvement of young people in the neighborhood, 3. Regeneration of spaces. The objective was to analyze and compare, on the basis of the suggestions emerging from the interviews, the perceptions of young people and their most personal experiences.

### Phase 2. Re-think by network

The second phase of the project was dedicated to the participation of local communities and to strengthening the active citizenship skills of the young people involved through the experiential and learning-by-doing approach.

1. Present the research to the local communities.
2. Train the trainers. To provide the youth involved with more tools and skills for conducting subsequent activities, the organizations have organized some online training sessions. This also allowed the local teams to get to know each other and discuss the challenges encountered. The training included the following modules:
  - a) Elements of community empowerment
  - b) Experiences of urban regeneration
  - c) ECO-regenerated spaces
  - d) How to involve the communities: experiences and risks
  - e) Neighborhoods and community life
  - f) Facilitation techniques for group
3. Local workshop. The workshops, organised at the local level with the involvement of local communities, aimed at selecting an area of the territory through the mapping of the territory, identifying a building or a space to "regenerate", collecting ideas and proposals for the regeneration intervention, discussing the feasibility and usefulness of the proposals for the territory with citizens and institutions.

### Phase 3. Regenerate spaces

In the last phase, the urban regeneration intervention proposals were formalized and presented to the local administrations. In some cases the interventions have also been implemented or the foundations have been laid for subsequent implementation. In light of the work carried out, the project has developed a handbook that summarizes the essential elements of urban regeneration interventions for community empowerment.

Six steps model for community empowerment according to the CROSS project:

<b>STEP 1 - Enter the community</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Identifying potential community partners (local organizations, informal leaders, interest groups)	Communication techniques - active listening, feedback, reframing, open-ended questioning	Creation of a working group composed of community representatives and the researchers
Presenting the project and its objectives to the community	Facilitation techniques - conflict management, mediation, negotiation, motivation	The establishment of a shared vision of the project and its benefits to the community
Listening to the community's opinions and concerns about the project, responding to their concerns and questions, and negotiating agreements and rules for collaboration	Evaluation techniques - interviews, surveys, observations	The establishment of a psychological contract between the community and the researchers, which establishes responsibilities, expectations and values

<b>STEP 2 - Identification of community issues</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Conducting participatory analysis	Data collection techniques - focus groups, interviews, surveys, participant observations	Creation of a community profile
Analyzing data	Data analysis techniques	Formulation of a list containing the the main issues of interest or concern to the community
Sharing results	Data communication techniques - graphs, tables, concept maps, digital stories	Generation of a sense of awareness, encourage collective reflection

<b>STEP 3 - Community issues prioritization</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Defining criteria for prioritizing issues	Rating techniques - rating matrices, Likert scales.	Selection of a priority issue, which is the most relevant and urgent issue for the community, and which will be the focus of the project
Evaluating issues according to the established criteria	Comparison techniques - pie charts, bar charts, radar charts	
Comparing the issues according to their rating		Generation of a sense of commitment and responsibility in the community

<b>STEP 4 - Strategy development</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Breaking down the overall goal into specific objectives	Planning techniques	Action Plan
Identifying the activities needed to achieve the specific objectives	Assignment techniques	Monitoring System
Assigning responsibilities and resources for the activities		Generation of a sense of confidence and capacity in the community

<b>STEP 5 - Implementation</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Organizing operational arrangements of the project	Operational techniques - meetings, communications	Implementation of the project's planned activities
Implementing the activities envisaged by	Executive techniques - specific techniques for	Production of evidence and knowledge about the project

the project Monitoring and evaluating the progress	each type of activity  Monitoring and evaluation techniques - reports, feedback	Generation of a sense of satisfaction and learning in the community
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<b>STEP 6 - Transition</b>		
ACTIVITIES	TOOLS	OUTCOMES
Disseminating project results and knowledge  Learning from the experience  Moving on to a new issue and leadership	Dissemination techniques - reports, presentations, visual products	Social and individual impact  Reinforcement of the sense of continuity

## 2.3 Strengths and challenges

The CROSS project focused on two levels: the local one, with the activation of the communities directly involved in the activities; transnationally, through cooperative work between the partnership. The partner organizations have in fact adopted a shared approach and common planning of activities with the aim of testing a joint approach in diversified contexts. It was therefore possible to identify the common strengths and challenges that the project faced in the implementation phase. These last elements are particularly relevant because they allow organizations and professionals who intend to use the contents of this publication to be able to learn from the project experience.

✓ **Multi-professionalism and multi-sectorality.** Community work is complex, as is the planning of urban regeneration interventions. Complexity arises from having to keep together collective social, environmental and cultural dynamics, as well as individual paths. For this reason, an indispensable element is on the one hand the involvement of multi-professional teams who know how to read the context according to a holistic approach, and on the other the use of the knowledge and experience of the local population in the community. Thanks to this, in fact, it is possible to guarantee the adoption of all initiatives suited to the specific needs of the community, ensuring a sustainability perspective.

✓ **Informality as the key to participation.** An aspect of the approach defined by the project which in the implementation phase emerged as an element of success is the centrality of informal relationships as key elements for promoting participation. In fact, in peripheral neighborhoods citizens often experience a feeling of exclusion and disaffection towards political and social life which translates into a sense of frustration and discouragement regarding the possibility of having a positive impact on the improvement of their own situation or that of the community. In these contexts, the role of informal relationship networks becomes fundamental where mutual knowledge and trust facilitates the active involvement of people. The organizations involved have been able to build and activate collaboration networks at a local level, with informal groups of citizens, youth associations and civic or youth centres. This allowed the partner organizations to establish a relationship of mutual trust with the citizens and young people of the neighborhood.

✓ **Low level of youth engagement.** One aspect that represented a great challenge for the project was engaging the youth groups and making them remain pro-active over time. Despite the interest shown at the start of the project and the deep-rooted presence of the organisations in the neighborhoods involved, building a permanent/closed group proved challenging. This was also due to the age group, where interests and study commitments frequently change.

✓ **Implementation of urban regeneration interventions.** In the planning/implementation phase of the interventions there can be two main obstacles. On the one hand, the limited economic resources for carrying out the interventions and the difficulties in finding them risk creating too high expectations in the people involved, given the great need for structural interventions in the peripheral neighbourhoods. In general, the lack of budget for the implementation of urban regeneration actions/plans represents a serious obstacle to motivating and encouraging community and young people's participation in this process. On the other hand, the necessary involvement of local authorities. In fact, most urban regeneration activities require the approval of public authorities to avoid the risk of receiving sanctions. The process for obtaining this type of permit is very bureaucratic, requiring time and resources. Furthermore, there are so many economic and social challenges at the moment that the well-being of the population takes precedence over the recovery of spaces in the political agendas and this can make it complex to receive the necessary support.

✓ **The risk of excessive theorization.** Although the focus is very practical (that of urban regeneration), the risk of falling into excessively theoretical activities (e.g. discussions, planning, research) to the detriment of practice can occur. Finding the right balance between theory and practice is essential to ensure continuity in young people's participation, especially if it is intervened in marginal areas characterized by a high rate of marginalization, poverty and school dropout. In fact, an excessively theoretical approach requires a high level of academic preparation on the part of the young people involved which is often difficult to find in those who experience these challenges.

## 2.4 Results achieved

Despite the difficulties and the specificities of the different territories involved, the project achieved some common results. These are interesting because they allow us to estimate the implications that this type of path can have on the communities and young people involved.

Through the CROSS project, local citizens could express their views and needs. The neighborhood interviews activated a sense of collective reflection and agency among residents. Additionally, the young people involved discovered new information about the cultural and historical dimensions of their area. The focus groups were also a great opportunity for mutual learning and the exchange of personal experiences, which they weren't accustomed to doing.

The project created a space of trust in which young people contributed to mapping out the needs of the neighborhood and expressing what they would like to change. They proposed both immediate actions and more structural changes that will require the support of local institutions. A significant achievement is a heightened awareness among youth about their own abilities and power to transform and change the state of degradation in their surroundings. There is also a greater ability to address challenging issues, such as racial discrimination, both at school and in the neighborhood.

Young people are requesting more frequent opportunities to create spaces for listening, where they can share their everyday experiences and needs with the adults who surround them, including teachers and representatives of local institutions.

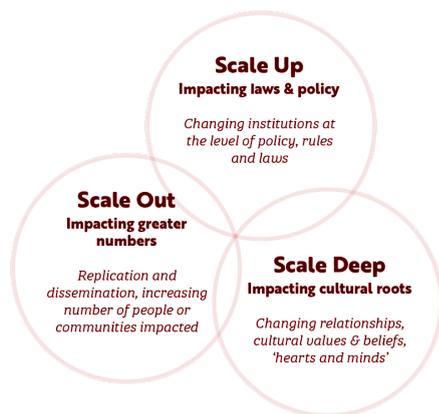
By empowering both individuals and communities, the project sets the stage for enduring development. When people are actively engaged in decision-making, they cultivate a sense of ownership and more resilient communities. Furthermore, the sharing of ideas on a global scale ensures that these communities aren't isolated but are active participants in a larger conversation, broadening their perspectives and approaches.

## Chapter 3. CROSS Guidelines

### 1. Social change: scaling Up or scaling Deep?<sup>1</sup>

In the current discourse of social change and transformation three prevalent scaling approaches dominate the literature. In order to achieve system change and impact a combination of these types is required:

- 1) Scaling-up consists of shifting the laws and policies of systems in order to either remove oppressive precepts, or to introduce game-changing rules that will bring social benefit to large numbers of people.
- 2) Scaling-out is about growing or replicating a solution to other geographic areas, including lateral scaling to new target populations.
- 3) Scaling-deep involves activities intended to promote transformation at the sociocultural level of individuals, organizations or communities.



Scaling-deep recognizes that there is power in transforming culture. It acknowledges that interventions at the level of meaning and culture can prove powerful axes for leveraging change. Durable change often takes time and requires a significant amount of introspection, reflection, and personal growth. It necessitates a relational approach that values trust and connection and sometimes for individuals to confront their own

biases, assumptions, and beliefs. This work can be uncomfortable and lead to conflict. This type of change cannot be rushed or forced, and tangible results may take longer to manifest. CROSS paid attention to the Scaling Deep approach, which involves a paradigm shift in the forms of leadership, organization, management, and success metrics we adopt in projects and associations. Scaling Deep is a transformative approach to systems change that goes beyond traditional scaling models: *It involves deep personal and cultural transformation to create lasting and sustainable change. (...) It reframes dominance and hierarchies; emphasizing relationships, collaboration, and holistic understanding of systemic issues.*

<sup>1</sup> [The Art of Scaling Deep](#) by Tatiana Fraser, The Systems Sanctuary 2023; Moore, Michele-Lee, et al. "[Scaling Out, Scaling Up, Scaling Deep: Strategies of Non-Profits in Advancing Systemic Social Innovation.](#)" *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, no. 58, 2015, pp. 67–84. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/jcorpciti.58.67>; [Problematising scale in the Social Sector](#) by Gord Tulloch 2018

## 2. Youth active engagement - how to have an influence on the political level?

Active engagement of young people in politics is pivotal for fostering diverse and dynamic representation in decision-making. This involves multifaceted strategies, including early civic education to instill political awareness and emphasize the importance of voting. Creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and solution-oriented discussions through community forums and mentoring programs empowers young voices. Supporting and nurturing youth leadership roles through training, scholarships, and mentorship programs is crucial to enhance representation within political spheres. Connecting young individuals to pertinent issues like education, employment, climate change, gender equality, and social justice serves as a catalyst, igniting their motivation to actively participate in shaping political landscapes.



These concerted efforts aim to fuel youth involvement in politics, emphasizing advocacy, lobbying, and active participation in electoral processes. By advocating for policies aligned with their concerns and amplifying their voices through collective action, youth organizations contribute

significantly to influencing policy decisions. Encouraging and showcasing the significance of voting as a tool for societal change, coupled with initiatives promoting voter registration, plays an integral role in empowering young people to contribute meaningfully to their communities' development and the broader society at large.

## 3. Youth active engagement - how to use technology?

The project tested successful techniques for using technology, particularly social media, to increase youth engagement. Understanding young people's digital choices is essential as creating meaningful digital and visual material that addresses environmental and social issues can have important impacts on participation. Short films, interesting graphics and interactive activities are very effective in capturing and



maintaining the attention of young audiences.

Regarding the development of space regeneration it would be important to graphically capture the transformation before and after using visual media such as Instagram and TikTok, showing the efforts of young people in revitalizing space. This method not only keeps the community informed, but also creates a compelling story around the project.

It is also essential to encourage the sharing of personal experiences related to space reclamation. Motivating people to share images, videos or testimonials on social media not only encourages direct interaction but also spreads the project's message across participants' social networks.

#### 4. Collaboration and Networking within the community

The role of the territorial network is an essential element for the planning and implementation of community empowerment interventions. To deal with it is necessary to share some preliminary reflections. First of all, it is necessary to consider that needs of a social nature are not only growing in number but are also increasingly complex in their definition and addressing. In fact, these require different skills and professionalism, necessarily making community work multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary. It cannot therefore be believed that a single actor



can take on the complexity but will necessarily have to build alliances and collaborations to combine skills and resources. Another aspect to consider is that a lot of institutional and informal energies are moving in the territories to implement actions to respond to the needs of the community. However, often the lack of dialogue and collaboration weakens interventions and causes a waste of resources (economic and instrumental, human and intellectual) as well as a loss for the entire community. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that when we talk about networks we are not only referring to institutional (such as administrations, schools, public social services, etc.) and private (associations, social cooperatives, businesses, etc.) actors who deal at various levels with a topic but also to the citizens and informal stakeholders. The tools

that can be used are those linked to participatory processes - assemblies, world cafes, open space technology, living labs - but also a constant presence "in the field" through small initiatives, which allows you to create personal bonds and trust with the community.

In light of this, networking allows us to contextualize community interventions more precisely because it allows us to build a more accurate analysis of needs and a clear picture of the territory.

## 5. Accessibility of spaces

Access to spaces is an issue that encompasses different aspects and requires an analysis capable of bringing together multiple disciplines. As the first aspect, it is important to consider the aspects that could be defined as structural or material. In fact, the first limits to accessibility appear in the structure of the space and in its location within the city. For example, if a space is poorly connected by public transport and is located in an isolated position, it will be difficult for people who do not have access to it to frequent it. of their own vehicle, similarly the presence of architectural barriers and the lack of support tools to facilitate accessibility clearly entail a concrete limit to the participation of people with reduced motor skills. The other level of reflection that we have been able to notice, in addition to that of physical impediments, concerns a more immaterial aspect and also in this case we are faced with a result of multiple intertwined needs, interests and expectations. The second aspect is more related to the "perception": how space is perceived and how one perceives oneself in relation to it. We can



note the difference, for example, between a square in which an intervention has been carried out, a mural for example, by an artist or a square in which the same intervention has been carried out in collaboration with citizens, in this second case the perception of having contributed to improving a space coincides with the growth of a sense of belonging and a desire to preserve the property itself. The accessibility of a space also depends on the extent to which one feels free to express oneself fully and safely, and affects a person's willingness to frequent this space or not, without

the risk of being discriminated against or attacked for This. To build these places it is essential

that there is collective reflection and participation in the construction processes.

## 6. Youth active engagement - how to involve them in urban regeneration processes?

The involvement of young people in urban regeneration processes is healthy and beneficial for the creation of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities. The first essential element is to include youth in decision-making processes. To put this representation into practice, youth councils or advisory councils could be established including young people, adults, seniors, specifically focused on urban regeneration projects. The second element is the use of creative methods and visual art, such as art installations, street performances or interactive exhibitions. These approaches can make the regeneration process more visually attractive and interactive, capturing the interest of young people. Also the partnerships with educational institutions are needed to incorporate urban regeneration projects into the curriculum or as extracurricular activities. This allows young people to learn first-hand about urban issues and participate in practical solutions. Another important aspect is the role of adults as facilitators: young people should be encouraged to initiate their own projects or initiatives in the regeneration process while adult stakeholders can provide support, resources and mentoring to help them develop and implement their ideas, fostering a sense of community ownership and responsibility. Digital tools can also have a relevant role in fostering participation, for example using digital platforms or online applications where young people can contribute ideas, vote on proposals or get involved in discussions related to urban regeneration. This allows for the participation of those who cannot attend physical meetings. Moreover, urban regeneration projects can represent important volunteering opportunities for young people and to make them more attractive they could include the following elements: 1) Youth-led initiatives.

Empower young people to initiate and lead their own volunteering projects or campaigns within their communities. Provide support, resources and mentoring to help them plan, implement and sustain their initiatives, encouraging a sense of ownership and belonging; 2) Recognition and incentive, Recognize and celebrate the contributions of youth volunteers through awards, certificates or public recognition. Offer incentives such as credit for volunteer hours, networking opportunities, or



access to exclusive events to drive participation; 3) Peer engagement and mentoring. Encourage peer engagement by mobilizing youth ambassadors or volunteer champions to promote volunteering among their peers. Youth peer mentoring programs can also provide guidance and support to young people who are new to volunteering; 4) Youth-friendly volunteer environments. Create volunteering environments that are welcoming, inclusive and youth-friendly. Ensure volunteer opportunities are accessible, engaging and aligned with young people's interests and values, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose.





## ERASMUS+ CROSS

# URBAN REGENERATION HANDBOOK

By 'urban regeneration' we mean an intervention capable of generating a recovery of compromised city spaces, generating redevelopment from both an architectural-structural and a social, cultural and environmental point of view. This term is inextricably linked to the evolution of the cities themselves and their history. In fact, it is developed as a result of the expansion of the cities and the production and development of new contradictions, from the need to intervene on unhealthy spaces born as a result of the process of industrialisation and expansion, to the need to intervene to find new destinations for old structures or abandoned spaces, following a change in the economic and productive fabric of the city. With the affirmation of environmental policies aimed at reducing the impact of construction and soil consumption, "urban regeneration" becomes a central element in the European debate precisely because of aspects of spatial recovery, conversion and sustainability related to it.

However, we must be careful not to confuse it with the term, 'urban renewal', which often refers to interventions mainly of destruction and reconstruction of a more or less openly speculative nature, neglecting the dimension of sustainability and social impact.

Regeneration also brings with it many contradictions, pointed out by numerous sociologists or researchers, such as the uncritical exaltation of decorum as the central element of city authority interventions, often generating operations that are only in favour of a certain segment of the affluent population, coupled with the risk of gentrification and the consequent removal of the weaker segments of the population from the neighbourhoods or 'redeveloped' areas.



### 1) BE CREATIVE

Be able to see a space for what it could be, and not for what it already is, imagining an intervention capable of placing citizens and their needs at the centre, making spaces and cities citizen-friendly. Building spaces to be in and not just spaces to walk through.

### 2) IMPROVE SPACES

Choose a space that needs to be converted, a space that can be improved or modified according to the needs of the people who actually live in it.



### 3) PREFER HOLISTIC APPROACH



The objective of regeneration is the reuse or reorganisation of spaces that have already been built. The process not only takes care of the buildings but also of the people. The intervention must hold together several factors: environmental aspect, social aspect, physical aspect. Intervening in city spaces means intervening in the lives of the people who live these spaces, working towards a project that sees the contribution of different professions and disciplines

**Regeneration**  
intervention in the physical-  
environmental-social-economic space



**Redevelopment**  
intervention in physical space

### 4) PAY ATTENTION TO ACCESSIBILITY

Spaces should be usable by all and everyone without distinction of gender, ethnicity, economic status, sexual orientation and religion, taking into account people with limited mobility or walking difficulties in the first place. Building accessible and safe spaces is the first step to building cities that are truly home to all.



## 5) PROMOTE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Placemaking is a multidisciplinary approach to planning, design and management of public spaces. Placemaking seeks to utilise all the resources of a local community, both the material and, more importantly, the immaterial, such as inspiration, ideas, unexpressed potential and knowledge of the area, with the aim of building spaces that have an identity and a function.

Spaces that can improve the life of the city and neighbourhoods, both in terms of urban vitality, promotion of culture, happiness and well-being. To do this, it is essential that groups of active citizens. They become 'place makers', and actively participate in all phases of design and intervention, not only to increase the chance that needs will be met, but also to create a sense of collective attachment and responsibility to the product of the process.

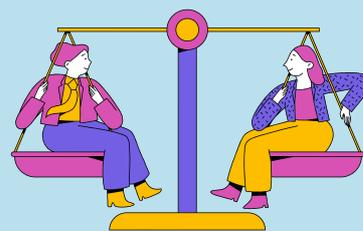


## 6) BE SUSTAINABLE

The objective of urban regeneration is to contribute to making cities sustainable and more people-friendly by counteracting the frenetic and indiscriminate use of building land. The intervention must therefore be sustainable and not involve further consumption of land or other resources. The environmental impact must be as limited as possible, and in the case of new constructions one must always try to use materials that are as sustainable as possible. One can, for example, imagine the presence of plants or trees to compensate for new constructions, or imagine in the conversion of spaces, some zones of intervention dedicated exclusively to the reduction of impact through practices that can be considered a tool to make the city more resilient with respect to climate change.

## 7) RESPECT THE CONTEXT

The intervention must fit into the local framework and not attempt to distort the context. To regenerate means to bring new life, but this must always be done taking into account the whole within which it is placed. This is why it is important to know the identity of the place in which we intervene, to enhance its culture and history, bringing ideas that can mix and contaminate with these experiences, with respect and making themselves available.



## 8) SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE SCALE

Interventions can be on different scales, from the regeneration of a square to the installation of a small sculpture or the creation of a mural, what counts is the path and the reasoning behind the intervention. Even a bench in a park can be a regeneration intervention, as long as it activates or has activated all the aspects we have now identified.